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IMPROVEMENT OF AUTOBAHNEN UNDER GDR FIVE-YEAR PLAN

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The idea of autobahnen has not been the same in all countries and at all times. The specifications for the autobahn in Germany as a special form of traffic road may be summed up as follows:

1. The direction of traffic on autobahnen must be established by the very form of the installation (separate roadway for each direction).
2. All highways, roads, paths and railroads that meet an autobahn must cross it either above or below grade (grade separation).
3. Access roads must not enter the autobahnen abruptly.
4. Autobahnen must be connected with the rest of the road system only at special access points (entrance and exit points).
5. The route of an autobahn, both horizontal and vertical, must satisfy all safety requirements for high-speed traffic. It follows that autobahnen will avoid areas scheduled for ultimate building development.
6. The foundation and structure of the roadways must be particularly durable in order to allow unrestricted movement of fast-moving and heavy vehicles.

For planning purposes, the autobahnen can only be considered as a peak-load system for long-distance traffic.

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The above concept of an autobahn can become a reality only if financial and material means are available in extraordinary amounts. Therefore, this idea can be carried into practice only when automobile traffic has grown to the point where it can no longer be handled by the existing road network, or when the development of traffic is hindered by influences affecting its safety. There also may be entirely different reasons which would require the construction of autobahnen.

The construction of autobahnen was interrupted by the war. Work on them was stopped at once or continued only until individual sections could be opened, without attention to the completion of accessory installations required for operation and traffic. For instance, there is no highway maintenance section on the Berlin-Dresden route, nor on the Dresden-Bautzen or Chamnitz-Hof routes. Other maintenance sections must be expanded to meet the demands on them.

The duties of the maintenance sections include the following: service and patrolling of the pavements proper, including the grouting of joints; observation of the position of the slabs and of any cracks in them; observation of the cuts and fills and the plantings thereon; keeping the ditches clear; care of the grass marginal strips and of the center strip and their plantings; observation and clearing of the culverts crossing the autobahnen; supervision of autobahn buildings and structures, such as maintenance section yards, service stations, and roadside stations; setting up and care of traffic signs; closing off sections when repairs are in progress, and arranging for detours. All of this represents only part of the work, but outlines the essential elements of the summer activities of a maintenance section.

The tasks in winter are more extensive and absorb all the time, energy, and capabilities of the personnel. The preparatory jobs must be done as in every other highway maintenance section and are distinguished only by the special equipment that must be maintained, which requires a considerably higher level of condition and completeness. Besides all this, the operations of the autobahn maintenance sections must be kept on a 24-hour basis from the beginning of the ice and snow period until the end of winter.

Traffic facilities were incomplete or nonexistent at the outbreak of the war, and, because of the sudden stoppage of work in progress, they remained so. During the war, several completed gasoline stations, motels, and roadside stations were damaged by bombing; some of them were completely destroyed, others lost their supplies and equipment. Some of these installations have been restored, but others must be reconstructed in the course of the Five-Year Plan so that vehicles can refuel on the autobahn itself and long-distance drivers can take their rest periods without leaving the autobahn area.

Access points that are now only on one side must be made two-sided, so that crossing of the autobahn by vehicles can again be eliminated.

The senseless destruction of numerous bridges and structures on the autobahnen at the end of the war is an obstructing influence today, especially in the vicinity of Berlin, where traffic must continually change roadways. The destroyed overpasses above the autobahnen must be rebuilt under the Five-Year Plan. The traffic formerly routed over these structures, which was mostly local and neighborhood traffic, now crosses the roadways of the autobahnen directly and is a constant source of danger to fast-moving traffic. Even though these danger points are marked by warning signs, they must be eliminated as the flow of high-speed traffic increases in the next 5 years.

- 2 - **RESTRICTED**

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Other war damage, less striking but no longer endurable for the economy and the traffic, also awaits elimination. Roadway maintenance was neglected during and after the war. The joints have not been grouted, or have been grouted with unsuitable material. Slabs have sunk, risen, or warped as a result of untamped or frost-damaged subgrades or because the dowelling has fallen out. Damage like this has become so widespread today that its repair can no longer be postponed. Repair crews have already been trained in the use of the necessary equipment and this very urgent work will be substantially completed by the end of 1952.

Plantings on and beside the autobahnen have been badly neglected. The plantings on the center strip have almost disappeared. It has been very difficult to keep plants alive on such strips since the layer of topsoil is in places only 10 centimeters deep instead of 25 centimeters, and all transplanted plants therefore perish unless they receive very careful attention. Nevertheless, shrubbery must again be planted on the center strips, for this is the only way to achieve the glare protection such strips should offer. This work is scheduled for completion during 1953.

Creation of mixed forests is of great importance where long stretches of autobahnen pass through long, deeply wooded areas. Beech and deciduous trees have been planted along the edges of the forests to ward off the danger of fire.

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- 3 -

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